

April 1, 2019

Staples High School

**WESTPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION**

**AGENDA\***

(Agenda Subject to Modification in Accordance with Law)

**PUBLIC CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

7:30 p.m., Staples High School Cafeteria

**ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM BOARD AND ADMINISTRATION**

**DISCUSSION/ACTION**

1. Coleytown Middle School Proposed Enhancements/Improvements, (Encl.) Dr. Anthony Buono  
*pages 1-3*

**WORK SESSION**

1. Coleytown Middle School Plan 2020-2021, *pages 5-52* (Encl.) Dr. Anthony Buono

**ADJOURNMENT**

\*A 2/3 vote is required to go to executive session, to add a topic to the agenda of a regular meeting, or to start a new topic after 10:30 p.m. The meeting can also be viewed on Cablevision on channel 78; Frontier channel 6021 and by video stream @www.westportps.org





TO: Westport Board of Education  
FROM: Anthony Buono, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning  
DATE: March 27, 2019  
RE: Coleytown Middle School Recommended Enhancements/Improvements

In March 2019, the district surveyed the Coleytown Middle School (CMS) teachers and administrators to elicit potential ideas for enhancements to CMS. Once ideas were culled from the survey, the administrative team worked collaboratively to prioritize work and develop education specifications.

It is the recommendation of the administration that the Board of Education and the CMS Building Committee thoughtfully consider implementing these enhancements during the initial phase of renovations. In the event mediating factors prevent this from occurring, we encourage the Board of Education and Building Committee to address these concerns after students reoccupy the building. These renovations will enhance the educational experience for our students and will provide learning spaces that are appropriate for 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning.

| <i>First Tier Priorities</i><br><i>These improvements require structural work and would benefit all of the grade configurations being considered.</i>  |
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| <b><i>Security Enhancements</i></b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Main Entrance Security Vestibule</b></li> <li>• 2 - Electric latch retraction exit device</li> <li>• 2 - Standard exit device</li> <li>• 1 - Power supply</li> <li>• Interior Electronic Strike Control Door</li> <li>• Interior Vestibule Window</li> <li>• Control Pedestrian/Visitor Traffic through main entrance near office</li> <br/> <li>• <b>Surveillance Upgrades</b></li> <li>• Upgraded all exterior cameras; including main entrance exterior areas</li> <li>• Building is under review for additional interior cameras (based on Kroll Report)</li> </ul>  |
| <b><i>Redesign of Library/Media Space</i></b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One major goal of the proposed redesign is to create flexibility in how the library/media center can be used. Flexibility will provide for larger and smaller spaces, providing for collaborative group work as well as larger meeting spaces to accommodate presentations and other larger group activities.</li> <li>• Fully interactive student run *video production center (replace current computer lab); include mac stations</li> <li>• Keep &amp; paint collaboratory (flexible teaching &amp; learning space)</li> <li>• Replace carpet throughout (matched current color scheme with auditorium; used interior decorator for assistance)</li> <li>• Keep Soft Seating Corner</li> <li>• Improve signage throughout all spaces</li> <li>• Maintain and expand reading nook loft (add additional soft furniture)</li> <li>• Replace current tables &amp; chairs on main floor with flexible, light weight tables and chairs</li> <li>• Add Projection system to main floor</li> <li>• Redesign circulation desk and storage</li> <li>• Add standing workspace around peripheral</li> <li>• Replace Fiction Stack with matching appropriately sized shelving</li> <li>• Convert small storage into proper store room (shelving, cabinets)</li> <li>• Reduce stack space in non-fiction &amp; reference area and expand soft seating and independent, quiet work space.</li> </ul> |

| <b>Renovation of Gymnasium</b>  |
|---|
| <p><b>Walls:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Method for completely closing off the back part of the gym (mechanical wall closing off both sides)</li><li>• Foldable wall instead of the curtain dividing the main gym area</li><li>• Replace fitness center accordion wall with a mechanical wall or a new accordion wall</li><li>• Wall Projector in one of the main area gyms</li><li>• New whiteboards in same locations</li><li>• Add a whiteboard in gym 1 (closest to main office)</li></ul> <p><b>Ceilings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replace frosted plexiglass on ceilings with clear for additional light and sunlight</li></ul> <p><b>Doors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exit doors need replacing (19 and 20 won't close securely---they have been repaired many times over the years, but still fail often)</li></ul> <p><b>Floor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Repair wood floors as needed</li></ul> <p><b>Water Fountains</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One in the fitness center and one in each segment of the gym (a total of 4 fountains)</li></ul> <p><b>Storage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• New shelving/organization</li><li>• Additional storage space comparable to the size of one of the other closets</li></ul> <p><b>HVAC--gyms and locker rooms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add air conditioning</li><li>• Updated heating</li><li>• Add dehumidifying</li></ul> <p><b>Offices</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bathroom with a shower stall</li><li>• Offices right next to each other (such as at BMS) with a meeting area between the two spaces</li><li>• Windows from offices into the gym</li></ul> <p><b>Locker Rooms:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Locker rooms on the same floor and adjacent to the gym</li><li>• One shower stall that is lockable</li><li>• Changing stalls with bathroom stall doors</li><li>• Replace lockers-- Approximately 300 in each locker room</li></ul> |
| <b>Renovation of Science Labs</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Renovate all six science labs</li><li>• Remove fixed seating and to reorient to classroom so the teacher's station is located along one of the long axis of the room rather than at one of the short axis</li><li>• Estimate for removing casework, capping gas and water lines as well as removing the fixed seating stations or lab pods. Demolition and site prep, plumbing, electrical work cabinetry work and countertop refinishing; \$45,000 per room</li><li>• Furniture, including mobile lab tables and seating; \$28,000 per room</li><li>• Technology, including relocation of smartboard \$7,000 per room</li><li>• Total cost per classroom \$80,000</li><li>• Total cost for six classrooms \$480,000</li></ul>  |

| <b><i>Additional Considerations – Redesign/Renovation of Music/Theater/Art/STEM Spaces</i></b>  |
|---|
| <b><i>Redesign of Spaces for Music</i></b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Three acoustically appropriate, large ensemble rehearsal spaces with high ceilings</li><li>• Appropriate and safe instrument storage</li><li>• Two storage rooms</li><li>• One room for music tech class</li><li>• Two ensemble rooms with appropriate acoustical treatment</li></ul>   |
| <b><i>Renovation of Space for Theater</i></b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove rear riser platform</li><li>• Replace door to drama room and rear of auditorium to double height, allowing set pieces to be constructed outside of the auditorium</li><li>• The rear black traveler in the auditorium needs to be replaced. In order to meet fire code upgrade to synthetic</li><li>• Cat walk is sub-par and needs to be updated</li><li>• There are spaces in the auditorium ceiling where the partition walls used to be</li><li>• The risers in the drama room are old and have not been taken down and appropriately been cleaned</li></ul> |
| <b><i>Redesign of Art Space</i></b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Updated storage solutions</li><li>• Central work station, similar to Bedford</li><li>• Kiln relocation</li><li>• Sinks along wall</li><li>• Access to technology</li><li>• New large art tables and appropriate seating</li></ul>   |
| <b><i>Renovation of STEM Space</i></b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Design and install new storage solution</li></ul>   |

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**COLEYTOWN MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PLAN FOR 2020-2021**

TO: Westport Board of Education  
FROM: Teaching and Learning Committee of the Westport Board of Education  
RE: CMS Future Usage

The Teaching and Learning Committee was asked by the Board of Education to assist in creating a vision for the future of education in Westport. Upon the creation of the CMS Building Committee, it became clear that the first order of business in this educational visioning is to determine which cohort of Westport students will be educated in the CMS building when it reopens.

The Teaching and Learning Committee has gathered a wide variety of informational inputs in order to help the Board of Education make this decision. These inputs include:

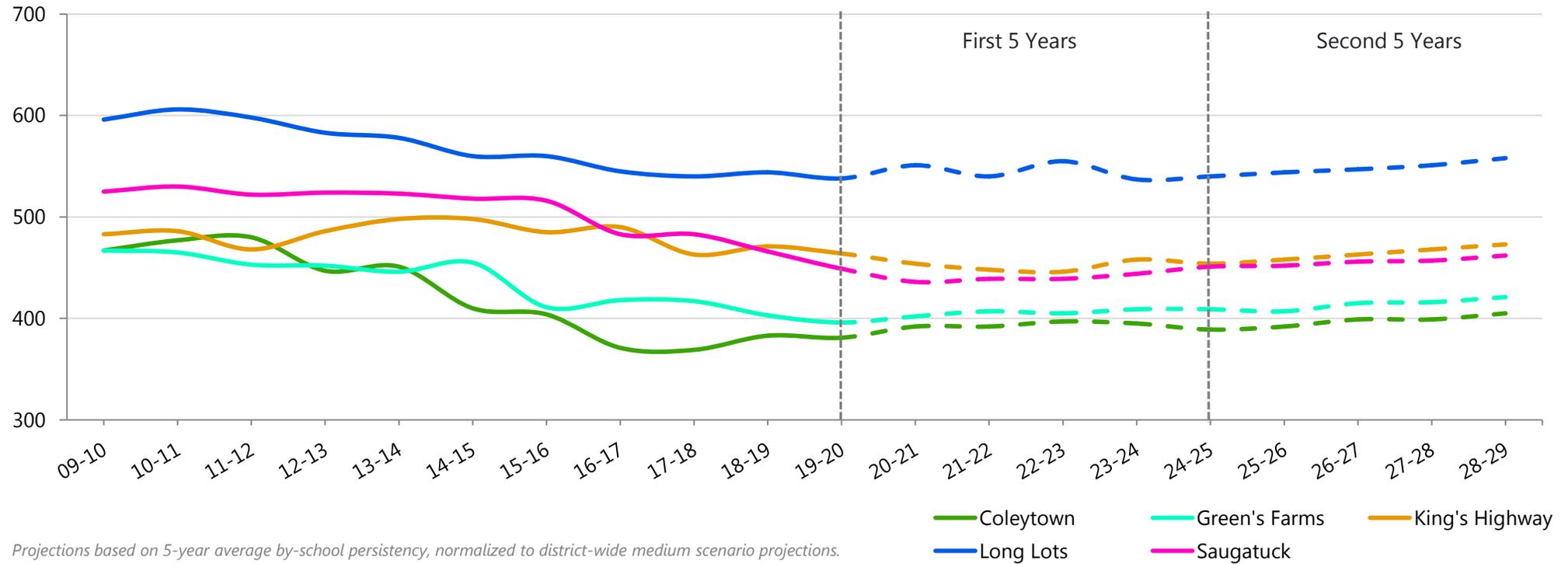
1. A variety of demographic scenarios from our professional demographer
2. A review of educational literature by Dr. Richard Lemons on grade configurations
3. The results of a parent survey
4. The results of a teacher survey
5. Scenario modeling developed by our school administration

As we have reviewed these inputs as a committee, we have been cognizant of the demographic imbalance between the middle schools that existed before the closure of CMS. This imbalance, combined with the fact that the district is now reducing staff based on enrollment, makes returning to the exact pre-closure model educationally challenging as outlined in the scenario modelling. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Teaching and Learning Committee that the Board of education adopt a model for CMS that would address this demographic imbalance. There are several options offered in the materials, and it may be that there are others that the Board would like us to further explore.

We leave it to the full Board to decide the best way forward and would be pleased to seek out any further inputs the Board might find helpful.

# Elementary School Projections

**Actual and Projected Elementary (K-5) Enrollments by School (Medium Scenario)**



Projections based on 5-year average by-school persistency, normalized to district-wide medium scenario projections.

- Elementary school (K-5) enrollments projected to bottom out over the next three years before beginning a slow rebound to 2,319 students by 2028-29.
- All schools except Coleytown ES and Greens Farms ES are projected to decline slowly during the first five years of the projections horizon.
- All schools are projected to grow slowly during the second five years of the projections horizon.



# Scenario 10

**What would districts look like if we maintained 5 elementary schools, moved Pre-K from Coleytown to Long Lots, and balanced enrollment? Is it possible to combine this option with a 6<sup>th</sup> grade academy and 7<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> middle school?**

## Scenario Assumptions:

- Maintain current five school configuration and balance enrollment across elementary schools.
  - Ample space within current five elementary school buildings to be a **viable long-term solution from a capacity standpoint.**
- Pre-K is relocated from Coleytown Elementary School to Long Lots.
  - Coleytown Elementary School's capacity increases by 113 seats once Pre-K moves out.
  - Long Lots capacity decreases by 113 students once Pre-K is relocated there. \*
- Coleytown Middle School converted to a 6<sup>th</sup> grade academy. Bedford Middle School would house grades 7 and 8.

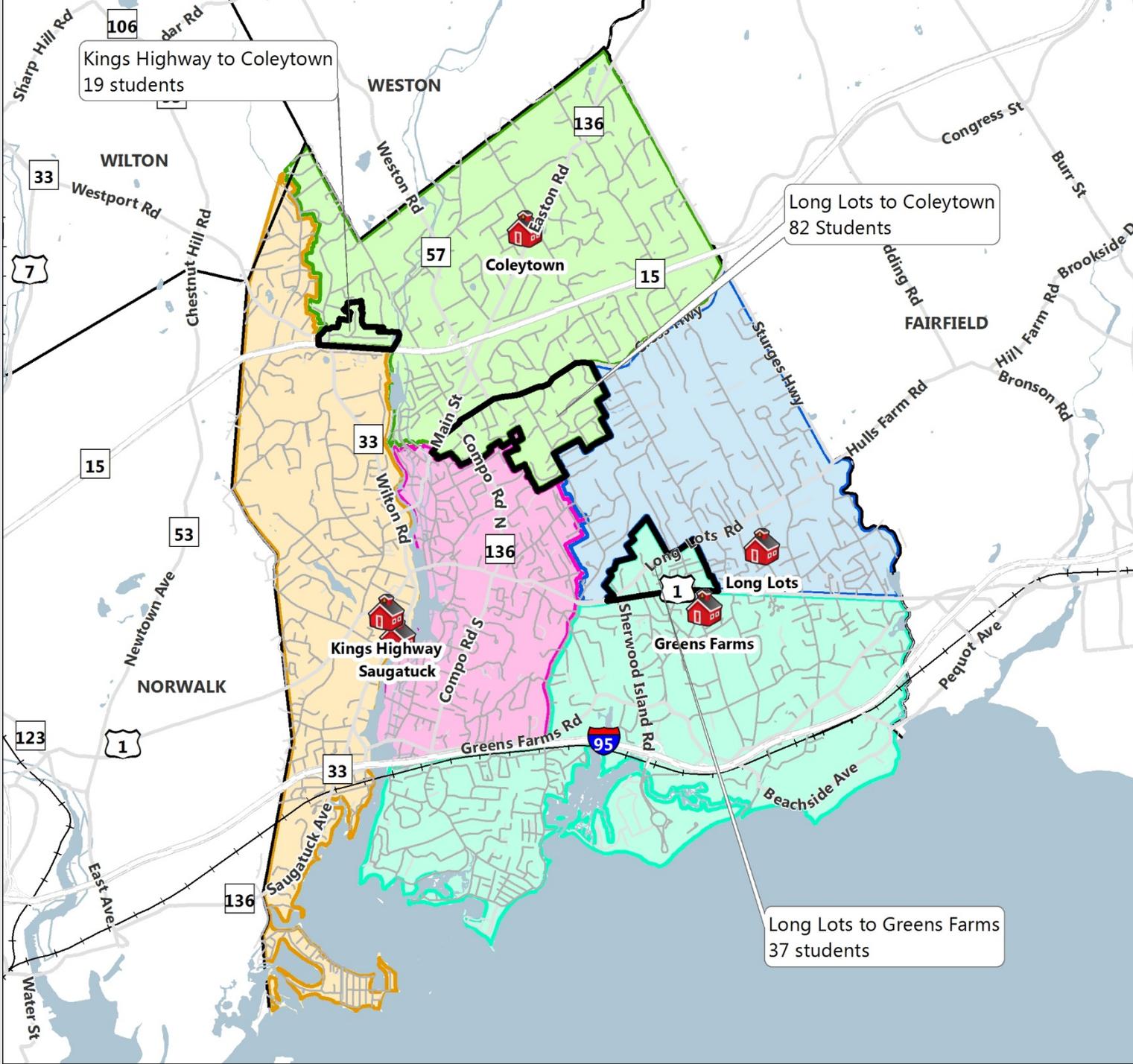


# Scenario 10 Districts

- Coleytown
- Greens Farms
- Kings Highway
- Long Lots
- Saugatuck

Changed Areas

**Draft for Discussion Purposes Only**



# Scenario 10: Considerations

| Elementary School                  | Total Potential Capacity (90% efficiency) | Scenario 10 Enrollment | Seat Surplus/Deficit | Utilization  |
|------------------------------------|---|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Coleytown ( <i>without Pre-K</i> ) | 561                                       | 484                    | 77                   | 86.3%        |
| Green's Farms                      | 516                                       | 423                    | 93                   | 82.0%        |
| King's Highway                     | 531                                       | 457                    | 74                   | 86.1%        |
| Long Lots ( <i>with Pre-K</i> )    | 505                                       | 425                    | 80                   | 84.2%        |
| Saugatuck                          | 553                                       | 478                    | 75                   | 86.4%        |
| <b>Total K-5 Capacity</b>          | <b>2,666</b>                              | <b>2,267</b>           | <b>399</b>           | <b>85.0%</b> |

- **Same Elementary School Alignment as Scenario 8.**
- Overall utilization of 85%. Individual schools range from 82.0% to 86.4% utilization.
- Would redistrict approximately 7% of K-5 students if implemented today.



# Scenario 10: Considerations

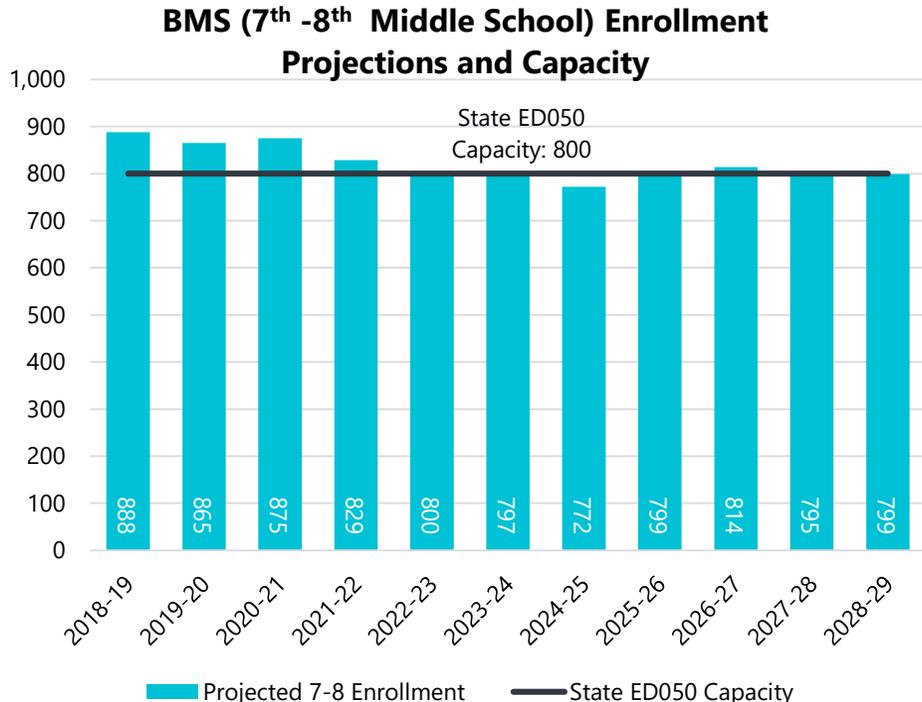
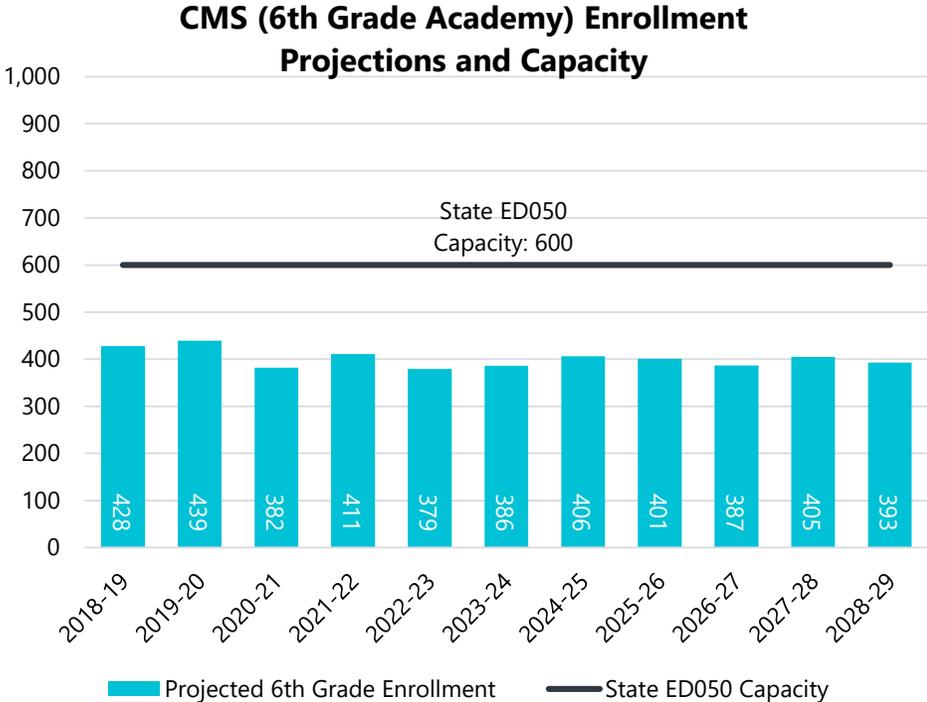
## Middle Schools

| Middle School  | State ED050 Capacity | Scenario 10 Enrollment | Utilization  |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Coleytown Middle School (6 <sup>th</sup> Grade)                | 600                  | 428                    | 71.3%        |
| Bedford Middle School (7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> Grade) | 800                  | 888                    | 111.0%       |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1,400</b>         | <b>1,316</b>           | <b>94.0%</b> |

- If district were to house 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Coleytown Middle School there would be additional capacity for educational programs or administrative space.
- Shifts additional students into Bedford – would be slightly overutilized in the short-term



# Scenario 10: Considerations



- Enrollment projected to drop to around 400 students by 2020-21.
- Enrollment projected to drop under 800 students by 2023-24 - aligns with building capacity.



# Scenario 11

**What would Elementary School Districts look like if Coleytown Middle School was used as a 540 student school (180 students per grade)?**

Scenario Assumptions:

- Middle School Feeder Pattern remains the same:
  - Coleytown and Kings Highway to Coleytown Middle School.
  - Long Lots, Greens Farms, and Saugatuck to Bedford Middle School.
- Pre-K is transferred out of Coleytown Elementary School to Long Lots.
  - Coleytown Elementary School's capacity increases by 113 seats once Pre-K moves out.
  - Long Lots capacity decreases by 113 students once Pre-K is relocated there. \*
- Shift additional students to Coleytown Middle School and feeder elementary schools.

*\* An architectural assessment needs to be done in order to determine whether the building aligns with State Pre-K Building code regulations.*

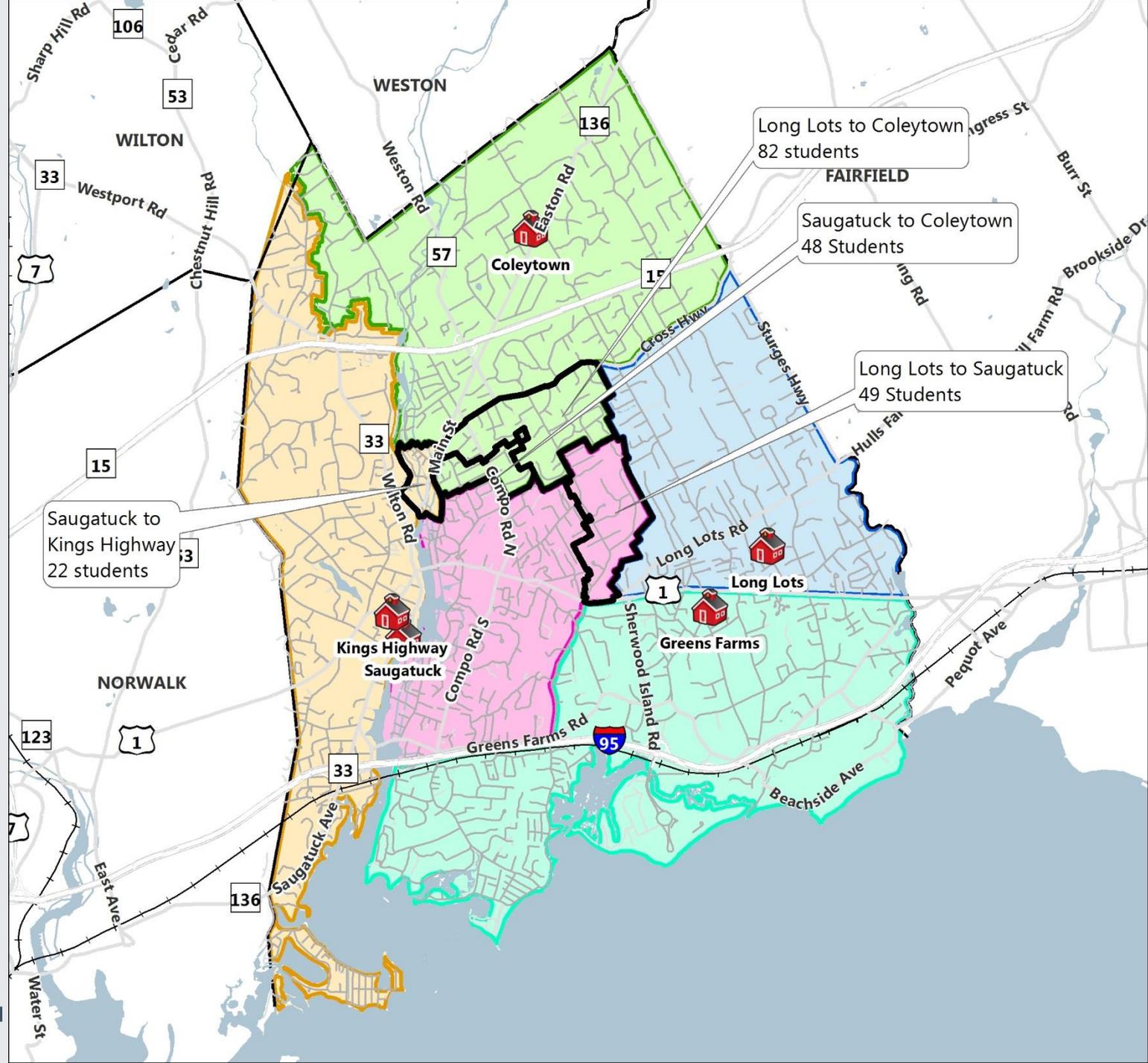


# Scenario 11 Districts

- Coleytown
- Greens Farms
- Kings Highway
- Long Lots
- Saugatuck

Changed Areas

**Draft for Discussion Purposes Only**



# Scenario 11: Considerations

| Elementary School                  | Total Potential Capacity (90% efficiency) | Scenario 11 Enrollment | Seat Surplus/Deficit | Utilization  |
|------------------------------------|---|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Coleytown ( <i>without Pre-K</i> ) | 561                                       | 514                    | 47                   | 91.6%        |
| Green's Farms                      | 516                                       | 387                    | 129                  | 75.0%        |
| King's Highway                     | 531                                       | 497                    | 34                   | 93.6%        |
| Long Lots ( <i>with Pre-K</i> )    | 505                                       | 411                    | 94                   | 81.4%        |
| Saugatuck                          | 553                                       | 458                    | 95                   | 82.8%        |
| <b>Total K-5 Capacity</b>          | <b>2,666</b>                              | <b>2,267</b>           | <b>399</b>           | <b>85.0%</b> |

*Coleytown Elementary School would gain five additional full-size classrooms if Pre-K is moved out, increasing its capacity by 113 seats  
 Long Lots Elementary School would lose five additional full-size classrooms if Pre-K is moved in, decreasing its capacity by 113 seats*

- A balanced Middle School feeder pattern results in an enrollment imbalance in the elementary districts.
  - **Low utilization** in schools that feed into Bedford Middle School (Greens Farms, Long Lots, Saugatuck) – **ranges from 75.0% to 82.8%.**
  - **High utilization** at schools that feed into Coleytown Middle School (Coleytown, Kings Highway) – **ranges from 91.6% to 93.6%.**
- Would redistrict approximately 10% of K-5 students if implemented today.



# Scenario 11: Considerations

## Middle Schools

| Middle School           | State ED050 Capacity | Scenario 11 Enrollment | Utilization  |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Coleytown Middle School | 600                  | 540                    | 90.0%        |
| Bedford Middle School   | 800                  | 776                    | 97.0%        |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>1,400</b>         | <b>1,316</b>           | <b>94.0%</b> |

- Based on current aligned feeder pattern - 5<sup>th</sup> graders in an elementary school all matriculate up to the same middle school.
- Shifts about 80 students from Bedford Middle School to Coleytown Middle School.
- **Cannot balance both middle school and elementary school enrollments based on existing feeder pattern.**
- **If the district were to implement a split feeder pattern (i.e. 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the same elementary school matriculate into two separate middle schools), then enrollment balance can also be achieved at the elementary school level.**



# Scenario 12

**Can we modify the middle school feeder pattern in order to balance middle school enrollments and hit a target enrollment of at least 540 students at Coleytown Middle School?**

Scenario Assumptions:

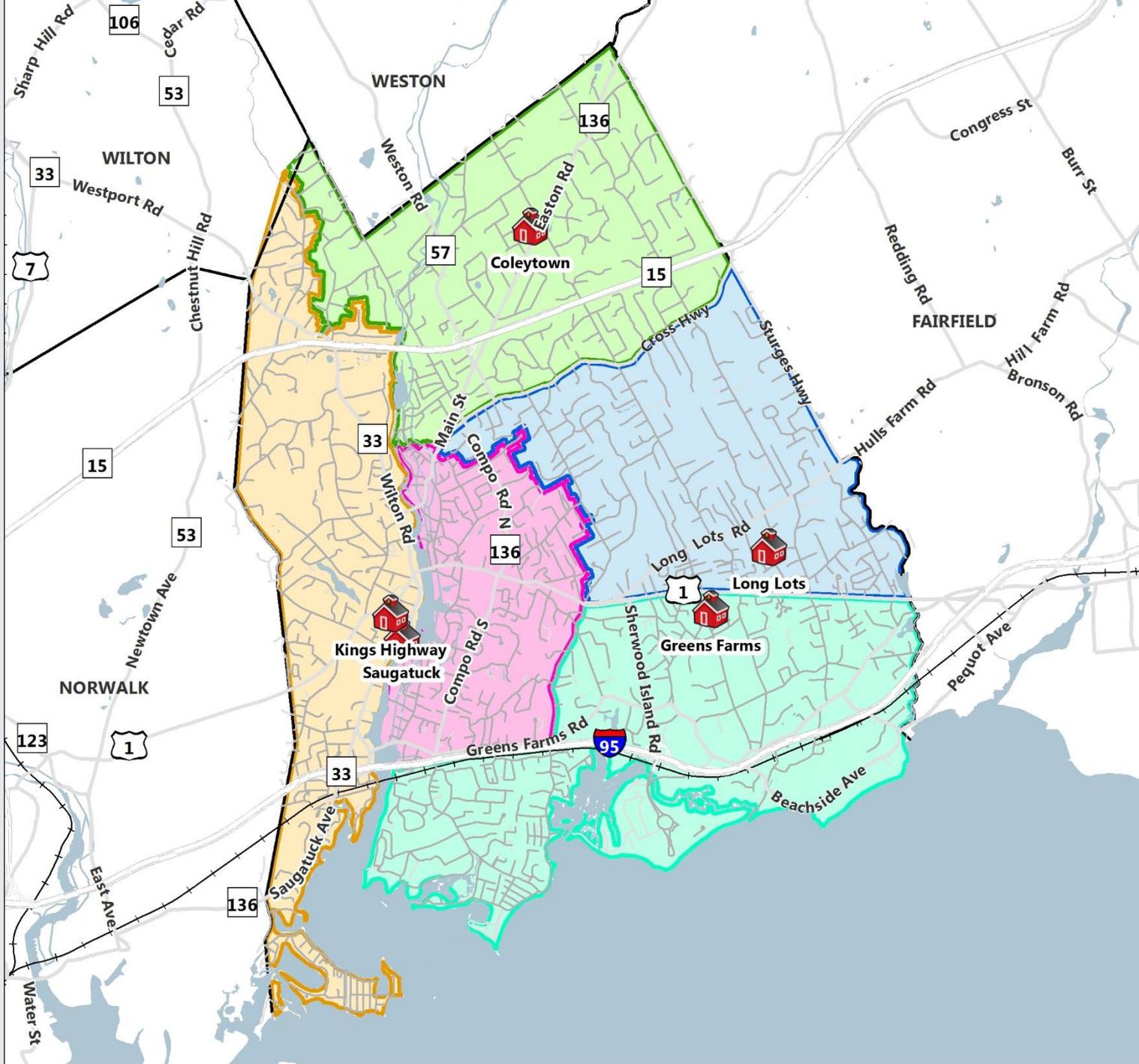
- Maintain existing elementary school districts.
- Modify the Middle School Feeder Pattern :
  - Coleytown and Long Lots to Coleytown Middle School.
  - Kings Highway, Greens Farms, and Saugatuck to Bedford Middle School.
- Maintain Pre-K in the Coleytown Elementary School building



# Scenario 12 Elementary Districts

-  Coleytown
-  Greens Farms
-  Kings Highway
-  Long Lots
-  Saugatuck

## No change in Elementary Attendance Zones



# Scenario 12: Considerations

| Elementary School         | Total Potential Capacity (90% efficiency) | Scenario 12 Enrollment | Seat Surplus/Deficit | Utilization  |
|---------------------------|---|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Coleytown (with Pre-K)    | 448                                       | 383                    | 65                   | 85.5%        |
| Green's Farms             | 516                                       | 403                    | 113                  | 78.1%        |
| King's Highway            | 531                                       | 471                    | 60                   | 88.7%        |
| Long Lots                 | 618                                       | 544                    | 74                   | 88.0%        |
| Saugatuck                 | 553                                       | 466                    | 87                   | 84.3%        |
| <b>Total K-5 Capacity</b> | <b>2,666</b>                              | <b>2,267</b>           | <b>399</b>           | <b>85.0%</b> |

*Total potential capacity at Coleytown Elementary School excludes Pre-K classrooms*

- No change from status quo
- No redistricting necessary at the elementary school level
- All elementary schools under 90% utilization

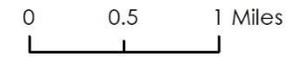
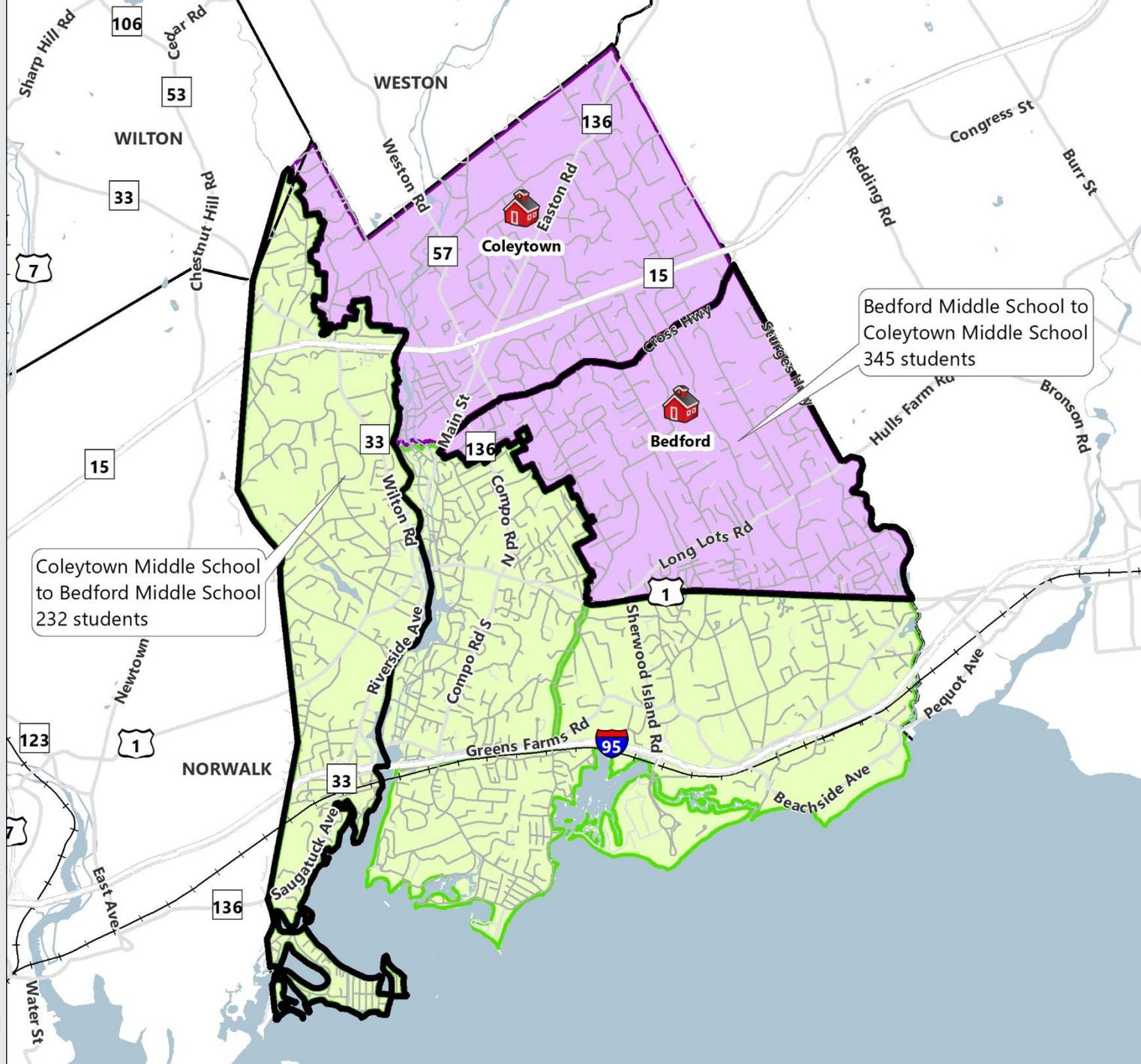


# Scenario 12 Middle School Districts

-  Coleytown Middle School
-  Bedford Middle School

 Changed Areas

**Draft for Discussion Purposes Only**



This map was developed for use as a planning document. Delineations may not be exact.

# Scenario 12: Considerations

## Middle Schools

| Middle School           | State ED050 Capacity | Scenario 12 Enrollment | Utilization  |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| Coleytown Middle School | 600                  | 572                    | 95.3%        |
| Bedford Middle School   | 800                  | 744                    | 93.0%        |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>1,400</b>         | <b>1,316</b>           | <b>94.0%</b> |

- Balances utilization across the Middle Schools – efficient utilization of space in both buildings
- Maintains aligned feeder pattern - 5<sup>th</sup> graders in an elementary school all matriculate up to the same middle school.
- Larger Long Lots School now matriculates up to Coleytown Middle School
- Smaller Kings Highway School matriculates up to Bedford Middle School
- Would redistrict approximately 44% of Middle School Students
- Some proximity and locational challenges - students who live near Bedford Middle School would attend Coleytown Middle School





# Research Review: Grade Configurations

## *Prepared for Westport Public Schools*

FEBRUARY 2019

RICHARD LEMONS

Connecticut Center  
for School Change

System Success = Student Success

# Context of Grade Level Configurations

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The most common configuration in the United States is K-6, 7-8, 9-12. A small fraction of students attend schools comprised of grades K-8, 6-12 or K-12.

Over the last several decades, theorists have advocated for and districts have experimented with numerous different configurations.

In recent years, several large districts (Cincinnati, Cleveland, Milwaukee, New York City, Philadelphia, Portland, etc.) have converted middle schools to K-8 configurations.

Some districts experiment with middle grades configurations as a means of dealing with elementary enrollment fluctuations or financial constraints.

# Context of Research

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Research on grade configurations tends to focus on middle school configuration (K-6 vs K-8 configurations), as opposed to various early grade configuration options (K-2 vs K-5 configurations).

Most research does not come from districts similar to Westport, CT. Some of the most cited studies draw from NC, FL, and NY districts. These are more expansive and heterogeneous populations. In the majority of these studies, findings are not disaggregated for students of different socio-economic levels.

# Finding #1: Research on grade configurations is imperfect and incomplete.

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“Research has not provided definitive answers to the myriad possible questions about grade span, but the questions have never gone away. They are questions which arise whenever school reform, increasing or declining enrollment, or financial considerations bring about a reorganization of existing schools, the building of new schools, or consolidation of districts.” Paglin and Fager (1997)

“The research base is very thin.” Howley

The existing literature is “ambiguous” on the transitional effect from elementary to middle schools, with several studies finding adverse effects and others finding limited impact on achievement. Kong, Zimmer and Engberg (2018)

Little empirical research directly addresses questions of 6-12 schools.

# Finding #2: On average, transitions tend to have negative consequences on students.

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There is evidence that, all things being equal, student mobility and moves between schools have negative consequences for students. South, Haynie, and Bose (2007); Ozek (2009); Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (2004); Schwartz et al.(2011).

Several studies demonstrate a negative impact of school transitions on student achievement. Alspaugh (1999); Bedard and Do (2005); Cook et al. (2008); Schwartz et al. (2011)

Recent students show entering middle school causes a sharp drop in student achievement relative to the performance of those remaining in K-8 schools. Rockoff, J. & Lockwood, B. (2010); Schwerdt, G. & West, M.R. (2011)

Each time students experience transitions between schools they experience increased feelings of anonymity. Paglin & Fager (1997)

Studies have shown that middle school transitions are associated with increased behavioral problems and declines in academic achievement. Allspaugh (1998); Byrnes & Ruby (2007); Cook et al. (2008)

Studies suggests that the transition to high school also results in a small drop in achievement, but less than the impact of transitioning in middle school. Schwerdt, G. & West, M.R. (2011).

## Finding #3: Traditional middle schools, on average, have a negative impact on students.

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Attending traditional middle schools, on average, seems to have adverse consequences for American students. Schwerdt, G. & West, M.R. (2011); Jacob, B. & Rockoff, J. (2011).

Middle school students report a relatively high level of stress in the social complexity of middle school life. Elias et al. (1985).

Studies suggest that middle schools do not appear to be better for low-achieving students. Jacob, B. & Rockoff, J. (2011).

Students with underdeveloped or maladaptive self-regulatory skills report increased pressure as they transition to middle schools. Rudolph et al (2001).

Traditional middle school configurations also seem to have negative effects on special needs students, though the effects tend to be in the first year of transition. Nelson (2013).

# Finding #4: The negative impact of middle schools transitions appears to be greater for students of poverty and students with lower initial academic achievement.

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Grade configuration has a larger effect on the math scores of traditionally disadvantaged subgroups (particularly African American students) than on other students. Schwerdt, G. & West, M.R. (2011).

The impact on ELA performance seems similar across subgroups.

Some studies have shown that high-poverty K-8 schools perform better than high-poverty middle schools. Silvernail (2014)

Rockoff and Lockwood (2010) find that students with lower initial academic achievement do worse in traditional middle schools.

# Finding #5: While in the minority, there are studies that call into question positive effects of K-8 school configurations.

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Some studies, though smaller in number, find neutral or positive effects of middle school configuration. Weiss and Kipnes (2006); Lippold et al. (2013).

A recent study also found a statistically significant adverse effect for middle school students in the transition year of grade 6, but unlike past studies did not find lingering effects beyond the transition year. Kong, Zimmer, & Engberg (2018).

Of late, there are researchers who suggest that some of the effects of middle schools when compared to K-8 schools may be non-randomness of student selection of type of school. Kong, Zimmer, & Engberg (2018);

# Finding #6: Research Suggests Some Advantages of K-8 and 9-12 or K-12 Configurations.

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Some research has shown that K-12 schools did as well or better on achievement tests as students in separate elementary, middle or high schools. Franklin & Glascock (1996); Bickel, Howley, Williams, & Glascock (2000).

Students in high poverty areas also did better in the K-12 schools. Franklin & Glascock (1996)

# Finding #7: School Size Research is Ambiguous as Relates to Configuration Questions.

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Grade configuration has implication for school size.

Research is ambiguous about the impact of school size on student outcomes. Hanover Research (2016).

Some findings suggest that small school settings have positive effects on student achievement and socio-emotional development. Darling-Hammond, et al. (2007).

Other studies suggest that those effects are minimal. Bangser, G. et. al. (2012). Darling-Hammond, et al. (2012).

The Gates Foundation's effort to transform large, comprehensive high schools into small high schools did not, despite vast resources and a specific theory of change, have significant positive effects for students. Strauss, V. (2014).

Other research suggests that larger school settings provide certain economies of scale, enabling more curricular and extracurricular variety and choice for students. Bowles and Bosworth (2002).

# Finding #8: Costs of School Configurations.

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The real costs of different grade configurations vary widely across districts because of various contextually-dependent variables (ex: how much money is spent on busing). Howley (2016).

Researchers suggest that disentangling local school budgets makes it challenging to definitively answer the question of which configurations are most cost effective.

A small number of studies suggests that there are cost savings in smaller schools with wider grade spans (K-12). Howley.

Some studies suggest there is little evidence that middle schools are cost effective structures for educating adolescents. Rockoff & Lockwood (2010).

Some studies point the shear complexity of determining real costs of different grade configurations or school size. Bickel et al. (2000).

# Implications

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“We should stop fretting about precisely which grade-span configuration might be ideal. One-size-fits-all prescriptions inevitably not only fall far short of the ideal, they’ve been doing consistent damage for much of recorded history.” Howley.

Evidence available does not suggest that reconfiguring alone will enhance student academic performance. Research tends to compare K-6 and K-8 schools, not the impact of moving from one configuration to another.

There is no single grade configuration that guarantees positive academic and social effects for students. Paglin and Fager (1997).

Fifty years of research on effective and high-improvement schools consistently indicate certain predictors of school quality: classroom instructional practice, leadership, strong professional community and culture, school climate, parent and community engagement. Bryk et al. (2010); Edmonds (1979); Purkey and Smith (1983).

Regardless of grade configuration, districts and schools should pay careful attention to the transition experience of young people, making sure they have well-designed and intentional academic and social supports.

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# About Our Services

The Center's core practice is partnering with districts and other organizations to strengthen their leadership, systems, and improvement strategies in service of improved and more equitable outcomes for students. We do this through coaching, consulting, and capacity building.



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# World Class Middle School Community Survey

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In March 2019, the district surveyed Westport families and educators to elicit feedback on supports and structures to advance a world-class middle school experience for students in our district. Respondents were asked to provide feedback for each of the following areas:

- Student Learning and Academic Programs  
(i.e., course offerings, programs of study, study skill development);
- Healthy Learning Environment  
(i.e., school culture, opportunities for student connections with peers and/or adults);
- Co-Curricular Activities  
(i.e., after-school or enrichment activities); and
- Scheduling  
(i.e., homeroom structures, timing of classes).

The survey window was open for five days. In all, we received responses from 196 families and 32 educators. The responses were reviewed individually to identify themes to advance middle school programming in Westport. These themes are presented by area below.

## ***STUDENT LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS***

In general, the parents support the academic programs in our district. Parents specifically noted the strengths of the math and science program, as well as the foreign language offerings. Others commended the arts and music program.

One of the strongest themes in this area focused on study skill development as a tool for high school preparation. Many families noted that their middle school students need to learn how to learn. One parent noted that students need explicit instruction on “how to study for the sake of learning and not in preparation for a test.” Another suggested a need within the curriculum for “ongoing, consistent, and continuous instruction and practice on note taking and summarizing.”

Parents also noted that more time is needed for student-teacher conferences and questions. As one parent noted, “We should be teaching students that they need to advocate for themselves and have more time to meet with teachers to go over things individually.” One parent said, “help them develop a philosophy on what kind of student they want to be as well as a process or a system for homework/ life/ balance.” Throughout the survey responses, parents requested more access to academic teachers to support learning.

Another key theme in the responses was a desire for a stronger emphasis on written and oral communication across the curriculum. As one parent said, “Our kids need to spend more time learning to think and express themselves.” Another suggested that “a greater focus on reading and writing skills will improve critical thought and communication.” Many parents noted the importance of grammar, spelling, and word choice in writing instruction, as well as a need for student-teacher conferences on writing and less peer review. Parents noted that students need more opportunities to practice writing.

One other key theme was a need for differentiation in the classroom, beyond the Workshop program. One parent noted, “There needs to be more differentiation, at an earlier age, that leads to a greater number of possible trajectories as our children move through middle and high school.” Many also noted that structures are needed to encourage children to dive into personal areas of interest, with adult support. To this end, one parent suggested that students have a voice in their middle school course placement.

### ***HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT***

Most responses in this section focused on optimizing opportunities for students to connect with adults. Parents feel that adult connections will help a larger school feel smaller and help foster a sense of community for students. Parents also see these connections as important for every student, not just those students struggling academically or socially.

In general, the respondents see the pod structure as the foundation for these student-to-adult connections, and many offered targeted programming suggestions. These suggestions include:

- Offer access to classroom teachers before and after school for academic support;
- Create a homework café or homework lab both before and after school;
- Connect students to recent alums, parents, local business owners and other professionals. Find ways to engage adults on special occasions, as well as part of the daily school routine in a mentoring capacity;
- Use the homeroom for community building or social-emotional learning exercises;
- Create structures within the homeroom setting for teachers to connect individually with students through conferencing about academics;
- Create a monthly mentoring program for teachers to connect with students one-on-one;
- Create a buddy program to connect sixth grade students to eighth grade students;
- Schedule student connections with guidance counselors regularly;
- Offer before and after school yoga and meditation classes; and
- Increase co-curricular offerings before the start of school.

Several parents commented that the seating structure in the cafeteria seating is an issue. These parents suggested tables with benches or chairs that can be moved between tables. Other suggestions include assigned seating, at least occasionally, optional study hall, or club meetings during lunch time.

Many others offered specific suggestions of programs designed to build social and emotional skills, ranging from the Choose Love Enrichment Program, Michael Newman's PEER program at Staples, as well as simply a broad emphasis on kindness.

Parents also noted the importance of active communication from school leadership and classroom teachers to help support a healthy learning environment.

## *CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES*

Overall, the respondents are pleased with the current co-curricular offerings but hope to expand the breadth of offerings, with a goal of affording students more opportunities to connect both with adults and each other in a non-competitive setting.

Some parents noted the importance of short-term opportunities or activities that students can join at any time in their middle school years. These open, ongoing activities allow students to explore interests that have not blossomed into passions or skills. Others noted the importance of physical activity before and after school, with suggestions of a combined approach of both open gym time and intramural sports. Still others see co-curricular activities as an opportunity for social and emotional growth. One parent mentioned engineering programs where students “learn to problem-solve in creative ways and learn the benefits of being resilient - learning to embrace mistakes and see they are opportunities to improve next time around.” To this end, many parents commented on the need for theater programs that accommodate all children who show an interest. Many respondents referenced the school play in a combined middle school, but many also mentioned competitive science activities. One parent stated, “Let's keep the kids kids and let them participate regardless of ability...Please don't deny middle school kids the chance to explore, participate, belong.”

Many respondents see co-curricular activities as a tool to connect with the community. One parent said, “We need to think outside of the classroom and leverage resources and opportunities for partnerships and experiences to supplement classroom learning.” Community service was also offered as a tool for leadership development. One parent suggested, “Let the kids run more things - dance committees, paper, or a school store that sells logo wear. Do fun school wide things for holidays, community service-based events. Let the kids create these and run them, not the PTA.” While several respondents mentioned community service as an outlet, others suggested the district reach out to the community to recruit academic team coaches or program leaders.

## ***SCHEDULING***

There is overwhelming support for a homeroom structure at the start of the day as well as later school start times for adolescents. Throughout the survey, parents noted a need for students to be able to meet with their teachers both before and after school for academic support.

## ***KEY THEMES***

Across the survey responses, there were four clear themes. These themes are:

1. Students need more opportunities to connect individually with adults in the school for both academic support and for their general sense of well-being.
2. Co-curricular offerings should be expanded to include non-competitive opportunities to build social connections and support students to explore their world.
3. Parents would like to see deeper connections to the broader Westport community through speaker series, mentoring, and coaching.
4. Parents would like to see a greater emphasis on study skills and writing across the curriculum.

## World Class Middle School Educator Focus Group Summary

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In March 2019, district administrators led focus groups with Westport educators to elicit help shape a world-class middle school experience for the district. Educators were asked to provide feedback for each of the following areas:

- Student Learning and Academic Programs  
(i.e., course offerings, programs of study, study skill development);
- Healthy Learning Environment  
(i.e., school culture, opportunities for student connections with peers and/or adults);
- Co-Curricular Activities  
(i.e., after-school or enrichment activities); and
- Scheduling  
(i.e., homeroom structures, timing of classes).

These themes are presented by area below.

### ***STUDENT LEARNING AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS***

Above all, teachers feel that students need more choice in their middle school experience. Middle school is a time for students to explore potential interests and paths, without the pressure of success. Participants see encore classes as a tool for this type of exploration. One teacher said “students should be presented with a variety of opportunities to think critically about their own trajectory in addition to coursework.” It was also noted several times that the encore offerings are a strength of the district and should be maintained in the future.

Teachers also shared a variety of approaches to integrating choice into the curriculum and schedule. One approach to encore courses is to have sixth grade students take four classes, one each quarter, and then to offer student choice for course selection in the later grades. Teachers see this choice as practice for the choices they will make at Staples. Another teacher suggested “an ‘advanced’ art or music course in 8th grade that may meet more frequently. Or option for an ‘advanced’ language course that meets 5 days per week or a course that meets 2-3 times per

week.” Student choice can be a time for students to extend their learning. A number of options for additional encore courses were shared. These options include: woodworking, culinary skills, knitting, and graphic design.

Another recurring theme was the need for small class sizes and a building to house students for sixth through eighth grade. Small class sizes support teacher-student connections and the three-grade building helps to support social and emotional growth. Small class sizes also support emotional safety. Teachers feel it is important that pods are consistent in both their size and their heterogeneity. Others mentioned the importance of consistent educational experiences across pods to support learning across years.

Teachers also see a need for a study skills course. Topics to be addressed in a study skills course can include: time management, typing, Google classroom, basic functions of spreadsheets, and digital citizenship. One teacher suggested an unstructured study hall period for eighth grade students to prepare them for high school.

### ***HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT***

Many suggestions for this area echo sentiments expressed regarding student learning and academic programs: teachers want small class sizes and small pods, and students need to learn how to be students as they begin middle school. The importance of easy access to teachers for questions and support was also noted here.

In addition, teachers support the developmental guidance program and would like to see counselors move with their students across grades year after year. Maintaining the student-guidance counselor relationship through the middle school experience helps build trust. Teachers also suggested that guidance counselors need private spaces to maintain confidentiality. Several participants suggested the creation of cross-grade programs such as ad hoc peer groups or advisory programs. Teachers also see value in a homeroom environment. One teacher said, “Having a regular opportunity to have a teacher speak with a small group of students so they can

speak up about ideas, topics, issues, etc. Down time (less structured time) is important to let those ideas flow.”

A number of teachers also mentioned discipline. One teacher suggested the need for “a reflective and restorative justice process for student infractions.” Another teacher suggested that hall monitors are necessary for a larger school. Yet another offered that all levels of support staff help teachers focus on learning. Teachers see the importance of clear discipline procedures in a large school.

### ***CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES***

A recurring theme in the responses was equitable access to co-curricular experiences regardless of ability, and a broad range of offerings for students. As one teacher noted, “there should be something for everyone.” Another said, “this is where students can see success outside academics.”

In addition to theater and sports, teachers suggested activities that reflect leisure or lifetime activities, as well as "real-world" experiences for students such as speakers, community service projects, field trips outside of Westport. The opinions seemed to be split on whether or not to expand the athletic offerings, as many students seem to participate in athletic activities outside the school system. Teachers also suggested offering activities before and after school. The importance of providing transportation at the conclusion of the after-school activities was also viewed as critical to their success. Still others suggested offering activities or clubs during the school day.

Several respondents felt that advisory stipends would increase the breadth of co-curricular activities.

### ***SCHEDULING***

Many of the suggestions here reflect feedback in other areas. Salient themes include:

- Strong belief in the value of a homeroom;
- Streamlining encore classes into quarter or semester classes to minimize transitions;
- Student choice in scheduling, especially in eighth grade;
- Offering a study hall during lunch.

Teachers expressed a desire to reconfigure the doubles period into longer core periods. Teachers offered ranges for the ideal class time of 45 to 60 minutes. Several mentioned a schedule with six class periods instead of eight. Others suggested a rotating schedule so that students do not have any class at the same time every day. Still others suggested a four-day rotation similar to the high school.

Teachers also shared a desire to schedule a dedicated reading block, rather than relying on core teachers to schedule it into their instructional time.

Finally, teachers shared that pull-out lessons impact student learning. One teacher suggested that activities like lessons or Workshop are scheduled into a student's day. Another felt that sixth grade students should not receive pull-out music lessons for the first half of the year.

# Coleytown Middle School Utilization Scenarios 2020-21



## DRAFT DOCUMENT

This is a working document and will be updated regularly as planning work continues.

March 31, 2019 Version 2.2

**Scenario 1 - Grades 6-8 Return to Coleytown Middle School: Without Redistricting**

| Academics  | Culture and Climate  | Operations  | Talent/Staff   |
|--|--|---|--|
| The current configuration would only allow for one team per grade level. This would create discrepant configurations/experiences between CMS and BMS. A one team configuration is more aligned with a junior high school model than a middle school model. | Maintains a smaller school but not necessarily smaller teams, which is a foundational goal for middle schools. | In order to create two teams at each grade level, redistricting would be required.  | Ongoing teacher collaboration is constrained to teachers working at this school. |
| Does not increase the number of student transitions.   |  |   |  |
| <b>Pros:</b><br>---maintains two middle schools in Westport<br>---does not increase the number of transitions for students<br>---would allow for the option to redistrict elementary schools to achieve greater enrollment balance                         |  | <b>Cons:</b><br>---will only have enough students for 1.5 teams per grade level<br>---a one team configuration is more aligned with a junior high school model than a middle school model<br>---does not balance elementary schools |  |

**Scenario 1a - Grades 6-8 return to Coleytown Middle School:  
Redistricting/Redirecting**

| <b>Academics</b>  | <b>Culture and Climate</b>   | <b>Operations</b>  | <b>Talent/Staff</b>   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Redistricting would allow for the creation of two teams per grade level. This would create relatively consistent configurations/experiences at CMS and BMS. This configuration supports the continued implementation of the middle school model.</p>                   | <p>This configuration allows for a school within a school approach. Conceptually, students work with a relatively small number of core teachers. Teachers and students work together and think of themselves as members of a team.</p> | <p>In order to create two teams at each grade level, redistricting or redirecting elementary school feeder patterns would be required.</p>   | <p>Ongoing teacher collaboration is constrained to teachers working at this school.</p> |
| <p>Does not increase the number of student transitions.</p>   |  | <p>Adjustments to student transportation will likely be required and may result in an increase in transportation costs.</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Pros:</b><br/>           ---maintains two middle schools in Westport<br/>           ---does not increase the number of transitions for students<br/>           ---creates more balanced middle schools<br/>           ---allows for a two team structure at CMS</p> |  | <p><b>Cons:</b><br/>           ---in order to maintain a true middle school model, redistricting/redirecting is required<br/>           ---additional transportation costs may be incurred<br/>           ---redistricting middle schools would not achieve greater enrollment balance of elementary schools</p> |   |

## Scenario 2 – Grade 6 Academy at Coleytown Middle School

| Academics  | Culture and Climate   | Operations   | Talent/Staff   |
|--|---|--|--|
| Having all 6 <sup>th</sup> grade students in one school ensures a consistent 6 <sup>th</sup> grade experience for all Westport students.   | Provides a year for students to adjust to structure of middle school without the influence of older students.                   | Transportation of students and start times will need to be considered.   | Sixth grade teachers would have ongoing opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about curriculum, instruction, and assessments. |
| This configuration creates an additional transition for students. Research indicates student performance is negatively impacted by transitions to new schools.   | Provides 6 <sup>th</sup> graders with a middle school experience in a smaller setting. Incremental transition to middle school. | This configuration will send between 400 to 450 students to CMS. Since the capacity of CMS is 600 students, additional space will be available for future consideration or swing space as needed.  | Administrators and school counselors only have one year to develop relationships with students and families.                         |
|  |   | Provides flexibility for future use of CMS once the comprehensive facilities review has been completed.  |  |
|  |   | All 7 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> grade students would be housed at Bedford, potentially causing an enrollment increase for one year (approx. student population 875). Subsequent years would see a decrease in student enrollment.  |  |
| <b>Pros:</b><br>---potential social/emotional benefit to students - smaller school, incremental transition to middle school model<br>---increased opportunities for 6 <sup>th</sup> grade teachers to collaborate<br>---does not require redistricting elementary schools, but does allow for this opportunity<br>---provides additional space for future consideration or swing space as needed |   | <b>Cons:</b><br>---creates an additional transition for students<br>---Bedford would likely increase for one year<br>---administrators and school counselors only have one year to develop relationships with students and families<br>---may impact transportation budget and start times |  |

### Scenario 3 – Grades 5 & 6 attend Coleytown Middle School

| Academics   | Culture and Climate                             | Operations  | Talent/Staff   |
|---|---|---|--|
| Having 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade students in one school improves the consistency of experience for students.  | Provides an incremental shift to middle school. | Transportation of students and start times will need to be considered.  | Fifth and sixth grade teachers would have ongoing opportunities to collaborate with colleagues about curriculum, instruction, and assessments. |
| Creates an additional transition for students. Research indicates student performance is negatively impacted by transitions.  |   | A significant addition to CMS is necessary in order to accommodate both grades.   |  |
| Questions regarding 5 <sup>th</sup> grade programming/configuration will need to be considered. Will 5 <sup>th</sup> grade follow a middle schools schedule or an elementary schedule?  |   |   |  |
| <b>Pros:</b><br>---potential social/emotional benefit to students - incremental transition to middle school model<br>---increased opportunities for 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> grade teachers to collaborate<br>---does not require redistricting elementary schools |   | <b>Cons:</b><br>---significant addition to CMS is required<br>---adjustments to transportation and start times will need to be considered<br>---scheduling and programing conflicts between middle and elementary schools will need to be resolved e.g. Will 5 <sup>th</sup> grade shift to a middle school schedule? |  |